

Information for the Teacher

Themes:

John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* offers itself for study in an educational setting because it unearths many themes using Nazi Germany that go beyond the literal application to the novel's characters and can be explored using contemporary experiences about human nature. The novel revolves around the most horrific genocide the world has ever seen, and as such can be used to further explore the Holocaust through literature by using powerful scenes of Nazi symbolism, mass murder, and discrimination. However, the novel contrasts our knowledge of the Holocaust's horrors with the innocence of childhood as Bruno comes close to knowing, but never achieves, the truth about his father's position. This naivety remains consistent throughout the novel as Bruno fails to comprehend what is occurring in his back yard, but his friend, Shmuel's ignorance is even more telling of the way the Holocaust pushed the limits of what we understand to be human indecency. Additionally, the relationship between Bruno and Shmuel provides extra dynamic to the novel as it highlights the theme of 'humanity' set against the backdrop of Nazi Germany. Bruno's ignorance frees him from the prejudices that plague his family as he fails to be indoctrinated to the Nazi way of life and applies no discrimination to Shmuel. Prejudice and discrimination are themes that are evident in the book and, unfortunately, can be applied regardless of location or date and can expose any personal connections to the text. Also, the novel can be used to discuss the power of restrictive forces as Bruno and Shmuel are divided by both figurative and literal boundaries that have fatal consequences if crossed. *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* offers itself well to literature study because it contains a fine balance of historical content and strong thematic matter.

The Author:

John Boyne was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1971, and still resides there. He has studied English Literature and Creative Writing. He began his career writing short stories, and has published about 70. He has also published six novels for adults, and two for younger readers. One of these, *The Boy in the Stripped Pyjamas*, published in 2006, won two Irish Book Awards, and was shortlisted for or won numerous in international awards. It has sold more than 5 million copies worldwide. While he normally devotes months for the planning of his books, Boyne wrote the first draft of *The Boy in the Stripped Pyjamas* in two and a half days, barely sleeping until he finished it.

Cross-Curricular Study: History

This novel's historical content provides a strong base in which the teacher could use as a segue into a study of the novel's historical matter. The novel's third person narrator offers very little perspective to the events surrounding Bruno's family, which keeps the reader at Bruno's level regarding his ability to comprehend the Holocaust. Using Bruno's ignorance of "Out-With" and "The Fury," this novel could be used to demonstrate how little Germany's population knew about the Nazi's actions at the beginning of the Fascists regime and how his lack of knowledge can stand in for a greater portion of people in Germany at the beginning of the war. More

importantly, the novel deals with Jewish discrimination in a few uncomfortable scenes and would require additional instruction on the part of the teacher.

English Language Arts Outcomes:

Speaking and Listening

Students will be expected to:

#1. speak and listen in order to form and express their thoughts.

-Students will have the chance to listen to the teacher and their colleagues read the text and respond with their own interpretations or thoughts about the novel.

#2. communicate information and ideas to others.

-Students will have a chance to discuss in partners, in groups, and as a whole class throughout the study of the novel.

Reading and Viewing

Students will be expected to:

#4. select and demonstrate understanding of a wide range of print and visual materials.

-Beyond developing a strong understanding of *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, students will explore various texts that also revolve around the Holocaust.

#6. express reactions to and opinions about visual and print material.

-Assignments, and class discussions, throughout this unit are designed to provide students with a medium in which they can express their reactions and opinions about the novel, its content, and themes.

#7. Understand the effect of language, style, and format on print and visual material.

-Throughout this unit, students will explore the novel's language, style, and format through a variety of assignments and discussions and what effect these have on the reader.

Writing and Representing

Students will be expected to:

#8. write and use other means (such as drama, multi-media) to express thoughts and feelings.

-Through the use of exit and entrance slips, character sketch, graphic organizers, journal response, essays and/or role play, poster, etc. students will be provided with the opportunity to express thoughts and feelings in forms that best suit their needs.

#9. produce written and other types of creative work individually and in groups.

-Students will be expected to work individually and in groups to produce written and other types of creative work to demonstrate their understanding of the text.

#10. use effective style and format (including spelling, grammar, and punctuation) in writing and other forms of expression.

-As an overarching element to any English class, formatting and the writing conventions are crucial to this unit. Students' quality of work will be assessed depending on the format and the 6+1 writing traits will be applied whenever possible. It should be noted that if the teacher notes a recurring problem in student work then it should be addressed *via* mini lessons whenever appropriate.

Plot Summary

"The Boy in the Striped Pajamas" is a fictional tale of the unlikelyst of friends: the son of a Nazi commandant and a Jewish concentration camp inmate. The story was written by John Boyne. The novel, set in Nazi Germany, begins when nine-year-old Bruno and his family must move from their lovely home in Berlin to a new house in an unfamiliar place called "Out-With." Bruno does not like his new home and often wishes that the family might return to Berlin. Nevertheless, Bruno is tempted to explore his new environment, even though he is told that there are certain places that are "Out Of Bounds At All Times And No Exceptions." Unable to fight his adventuresome spirit, Bruno ventures forth into the unknown one afternoon.

Bruno comes upon a fence that he follows until he sees a young boy sitting on the other side of the fence. The shoeless boy is wearing striped pajamas and a cloth cap. Bruno also notices that the boy is wearing an armband with a star on it. Bruno makes fast friends with the boy, Shmuel, and they quickly discover that they share the same birthday. The boys discuss their families and where they are from. Shortly after meeting Shmuel, Bruno's father has dinner guests; the man's name is "the Fury" and his date is called Eva. Bruno instantly dislikes the couple. Much like Bruno hears "[Auschwitz](#)" as "Out-With," he also incorrectly hears "[the Führer](#)" as "the Fury." Boyne tells the story from Bruno's perspective; it is clear that the innocence of Bruno's childhood remains intact despite the fact that he is living on the periphery of a death camp and has met Adolf Hitler.

Bruno often finds himself at the fence spending time with Shmuel. Bruno brings him food, and the friends lament the fact that they cannot explore together or play a game of football. Shmuel confides in Bruno that he is unable to find his father and he is worried. Bruno vows to help Shmuel look for his father; to that end, Shmuel promises to get Bruno some pajamas so that he will blend in on his side of the fence. One fateful day, Bruno sheds his clothes, dons the pajamas, and sneaks onto Shmuel's side of the fence. As the boys search for Shmuel's father, the soldiers herd the prisoners, Bruno among them, into the gas chambers where they meet their untimely death hand in hand.

Similar Books to Read and Study

The Diary of a Young Girl, by Anne Frank

When They Came to Take My Father, by Leora Kahn and Rachel Hager

Shadow of the Wall, by Christa Laird

Number the Stars, by Lois Lowry

The Upstairs Room, by Johanna Reiss

Behind the Secret Window: A Memoir of a Hidden Childhood, by Nelly S. Toll

Night, by Elie Wiesel

Film Suggestions:

Life is Beautiful (1998)

Miracle at Midnight (1998)

The Pianist (2002)

Schindler's List (1993)
Sophie's Choice (1982)

Setting, Mood and Tone

Setting: the conditions that form the background within which something is experienced.

Mood: the prevailing attitude.

Tone: The writer's attitude toward the material and/or the readers.

(Definitions from The Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

What is a Character Sketch?

Before one can even begin to write a character sketch for any character, one has to know what exactly a character sketch is. So what is a character sketch? A character sketch can be said to be a written description of a character in a story. When someone is writing a character sketch there are many things that have to come into the overall description so that the person who reads the description can get a good general idea of what the character is like. There are many methods that people use to characterize their character. The first method could be the physical description. This means: what does the character look like on the outside? Does he/she have glasses, freckles or blue eyes? It may also include a sketch/drawing of how you see the person in the story. Another method that can be used for someone to create a character sketch is what does the person say? How does he/she act around other people or when he/she is alone? This method is very important when creating a character sketch. What do other characters in the text say about the particular character? The final questions that need to be asked are what is the character like overall? Is the character the main character of the novel? Is she/he a round dynamic character or is she/he a flat character? Once all of these questions have been understood and answered one should be able to make a good character sketch.

Handout 1

Exit Slip

NAMES: _____ and _____

Date: _____

With your partner, discuss the phrase “Out of Sight, Out of Mind”. Write down at least FIVE lines about what you discussed.

Handout 2

Setting, Mood, and Tone

Name: _____

Date: _____

Setting: the conditions that form the background within which something is experienced.

Mood: the prevailing attitude.

Tone: The writer's attitude toward the material and/or the readers.

(Definitions from The Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

Discuss the **setting** in "The Boy in the Striped Pajamas": What are the two settings we've been introduced to so far? What is the time and place? What kind of environments are these? How are they similar? How are they different? How does the context change the setting of the novel?

Write down key points of your group discussion:

Discuss the **mood** of "The Boy in the Striped Pajamas": What is the mood of the novel? What is the feeling of the novel? How does it make YOU feel? Why?

Write down key points of your group discussion:

Discuss the **tone** of "The Boy in the Striped Pajamas": What is the tone of the novel? Why?

Write down key points of your group discussion:

Handout 3 Character Sketch Directions

“The Boy in the Striped Pajamas” Character Sketch Assignment

Choose a character from the novel “The Boy in the Striped Pajamas” to write a character sketch about. Outline the character **clearly** and sequence your thoughts and character details in a **logical** way. **Choose a main idea** to **focus** on and **support** this idea with detailed information. **Be sure to spend some time in your mind with your character.** Ask these questions: What do you like about this character? What don’t you like about this character? Is what you don’t like about them part of why this character appeals to a reader? It is helpful to explore as many details as possible about your character before writing your sketch. When writing your sketch, use vocabulary that accurately portrays the character you chose. A character sketch should give the reader a **vivid and detailed description of the character** they are reading about. Write this on your own paper.

Sample:

Jean Louise Finch

The character of **Jean Louise Finch** (often referred to as ‘Scout’) is the protagonist of the story. This character is a young female who likes to question her world and what is happening around her. When the novel begins she is six years old. Although she is only six, she is a very intelligent girl who loves to read. The novel is told from her perspective. The entire story “To Kill a Mockingbird” takes place during the years she is growing up and maturing. She is very curious about the world and the ongoing matters of her community. Some examples of these are the topics discussed in school, happenings in her neighbourhood, the legendary Boo Radley and the other people that live in her town. She does not want to act like a lady; not even as a girl. She is portrayed as a tomboy in the beginning of the novel but as the novel proceeds, we see that she does change her identity. She becomes more of the girl figure. Her father’s name is Atticus Finch. He also plays a very important role in the novel, but is not considered to be a main character; however he helps the plot of the novel to move along.

Handout 4
Rubric for Character Sketch assignment

Student's Name: _____

	4	3	2	1
Word Choice	Writer uses vivid words and phrases that linger or draw pictures in the reader's mind, and the choice and placement of the words seems accurate, natural and not forced.	Writer uses vivid words and phrases that linger or draw pictures in the reader's mind, but occasionally the words are used inaccurately or seem overdone.	Writer uses words that communicate clearly, but the writing lacks variety, punch or flair.	Writer uses a limited vocabulary that does not communicate strongly or capture the reader's interest. Jargon or cliches may be present and detract from the meaning.
Sequencing	Details are placed in a logical order and the way they are presented effectively keeps the interest of the reader.	Details are placed in a logical order, but the way in which they are presented/introduced sometimes makes the writing less interesting.	Some details are not in a logical or expected order, and this distracts the reader.	Many details are not in a logical or expected order. There is little sense that the writing is organized.
Accuracy of Facts	All supportive facts are reported accurately.	Almost all supportive facts are reported accurately.	Most supportive facts are reported accurately.	NO facts are reported OR most are inaccurately reported.
Focus on Topic	There is one clear, well-focused topic. Main idea stands out and is supported by detailed information.	The pacing is generally well-controlled but the writer occasionally does not elaborate enough.	The pacing is generally well-controlled but the writer sometimes repeats the same point over and over, or spends too much time on details that don't matter.	The pacing often feels awkward to the reader. The writer elaborates when there is little need, and then leaves out necessary supporting information.

Handout 5
Interactive Bookmark

_____ 's
Interactive Bookmark
The Boy in the Striped Pajamas
Pages: _____

Point 1: _____

Point 2: _____

Point 3: _____

Point 4: _____

Point 5: _____

Point 6: _____

Handout 6
Entrance Slip for Class 6

Name _____

Date _____

Two characters were discussed during your reading homework, Bruno's Grandmother and Herr Liszt. Write at least a paragraph describing the characters, and what made Bruno like/dislike them.

Handout 7
Jot-Pair-Share Directions

Jot-Pair-Share Instructions

For your upcoming reading assignment you have to complete a jot-pair-share activity.

1. While you are reading the chapters **JOT** down notes on a page about what you are reading. Pay attention to characters, setting, moods and anything else.
2. Once you are done reading and jotting, **PAIR** up with another student and compare the notes you have created. Discuss any differences you have and write down notes on what you discussed.
3. Be ready to **SHARE** with the class what you learned during your discussion.

Handout 8

Graphic Organizer Templates

Template #1

The Boy in the Striped Pajamas Graphic Organizer

Chapters: _____

Group Members: _____

Plot Summary: _____

What is revealed about the war in this chapter?

How much does Bruno understand about the war at this point in the book?

Template #2

Plot Summary	What do these chapters tell us about Nazi Germany?	What does Bruno understand about Nazi Germany?	Remaining questions about the war/Nazi Germany that we hope the book addresses

HANDOUT 9

Author Interview Simulation

With a partner, determine who will play the role of the author and who will play the role of the interviewer/reporter.

You must ask and answer at least TEN questions that require more than a one-word answer.

You may present the result of your discussion in the format of a written interview, or as a videotaped interview.

The reporter may ask questions from the discussion section at the back of the book, but this is not mandatory. You are encouraged to create your own questions, but may use the sample questions (based on those at the back of the book).

- What new insights and understandings did you want your readers to gain from reading this story?
- Why use words like “out-with” and “fury” instead of the real names?
- What is the message of your book?
- Why did you include such a sad ending?

Handout 10
Directions for Letter/Journal Assignment

Letter

Pretending that you are Bruno, write a one page letter to one of Karl, Daniel, or Martin (or all three) and discuss your move to “Out-With” and everything you miss about Berlin. When describing Out-With, be sure to use Berlin as a reference so your friend(s) can better understand what you are describing. Beyond the physical description of your new environment, be sure to include how things within your family have changed since arriving. Additionally, mention other peculiar things that you have noticed in Out-With and, lastly, sign your letter.

Or

Journal

Pretending you are Bruno or Gretel, write a one page journal entry that reflects your feelings about Out-With. Write about what you like/dislike about the house, what you like/dislike about your father’s new position, anything strange that you have noticed, and reflect on any changes in the family dynamic since arriving.

SAMPLE JOURNAL ENTRY

Name: _____

Date: _____

Dear Diary,

At first, I believed Father when he told us that moving to Out-With was for the best, but now I am not so sure. Our new house is much smaller than our old one, and it seems so gloomy. I still have my own room, and plenty of room for my dolls, so I guess that’s good. We also have a garden, which is nice. But I still don’t like it here, though I pretend for Mother and Father.

It is too quiet here. I miss my friends. There are no other children to play with around here. My brother is obsessed with the farmers outside who wear pyjamas all day. But they are too dirty to be interesting to me. So that only leaves me with my brother to play with, but I much prefer my dolls.

I thought that since we are so far away from everyone else that Father would have a lot more time to spend with us. But he is always working in his office, where we are not allowed anyway, or off on important business with the other soldiers, even if their uniforms are not as nice as his. One of the soldiers is very handsome, and is almost a friend to us.

I think Mother misses her friends even more than I miss mine. She seems tired and upset a lot, and argues with Father. I don’t know why, she of all people should know that Father always knows best. Still, I do not like all this fighting and crying, and I hope we can go back home to Berlin very soon.

Gretel

Handout 11

Choice Board Assignments

A role play on a theme from the book - obedience, discrimination, acts of humanity, or stereotyping.	Choice Board: <i>The Boy in the Striped Pajamas</i> Final Project	Write a short story or poem about an unlikely friendship.
Do research and write a short essay about genocide occurring in the world today.	Create a poster about the damage caused by prejudice.	Construct a piece of art (sculpture, painting, drawing) that represents the effect of friendship and humanity vs. prejudice and discrimination.

Handout 12

Rubric for Choice Board Assignment

<i>The Boy in the Striped Pajamas</i> Choice Board Rubric	4	3	2	1
Quality of Project	Project is of high quality and creative. A lot of time has been spent on it.	Project is creative and much time was spent during its completion.	Project is somewhat creative and little time has been spent on it.	Project is of low quality and lacks creativity. Minimal amount of time spent on project.
Content	Project displays strong understanding of the book's themes.	Project displays a good understanding of the book's themes.	Project displays a weak understanding of the book's themes.	Project does not display any understanding of the book's themes.
Application	The chosen form is used effectively to represent the theme focused on.	The chosen form is used somewhat effectively to represent the theme focused on.	The chosen form is used adequately to represent to theme focused on.	The project does not use the form to represent the theme focused on at all.
Effort Displayed	Project displays best effort. Time used effectively.	Project represents good effort. Most of time used effectively.	Project displays mediocre effort and the majority of time was not used effectively.	Project lacks effort. Time not used effectively.

References

Character Sketch outline and sample taken and adapted from:

<http://www.k12.nf.ca/stjosephsallgrade/killamockingEn/charactersketch.html>

Mosatche, Harriet S. Discussion Guide: *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*.

<http://www.trulymovingpictures.org/wp-content/uploads/BOYDiscussionGuide.pdf>.

Plot summary adapted from <http://www.enotes.com/the-boy-in-the-striped-pajamas>